

heard in the next selection of a lifetime appointment to the Court.

RECESS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess, as under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:18 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PORTMAN).

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is now closed.

NATIONAL SEA GRANT COLLEGE PROGRAM AMENDMENTS ACT OF 2015

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the House message to accompany S. 764, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

House message to accompany S. 764, a bill to reauthorize and amend the National Sea Grant College Program Act, and for other purposes.

Pending:

McConnell motion to concur in the House amendment to the bill with McConnell (for Roberts) amendment No. 3450 (to the House amendment to the bill), in the nature of a substitute.

McConnell motion to refer the bill to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, I suspect a quorum call has been initiated. If so, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is not in a quorum call.

The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. ROBERTS. Mr. President, today is National Agriculture Day, and I wish to thank the farmers and ranchers of America. The Senate is considering legislation on an issue that is critically important to our Nation's food supply. It affects everyone from our producers in the fields to our consumers in the aisles of grocery stores. Without Senate action, this country will be hit with a wrecking ball—an apt description—that will disrupt the entire food chain. We need to act now to pass my amendment to S. 764. This is a compromised approach that provides a permanent solution to the patchwork of biotechnology labeling laws that will soon be wreaking havoc on the flow of interstate commerce, agriculture, and food products in our Nation's marketplace, and that is exactly what this is about. Let me repeat that. This is about the marketplace. It is not about safety. It is not about health or nutrition. It is about marketing. Science has proven again and again and again

that the use of agriculture biotechnology is 100 percent safe.

In fact, last year the Agriculture Committee heard from three Federal agencies tasked with regulating agriculture biotechnology: the Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the Environmental Protection Agency—yes, the EPA—and the Food and Drug Administration, the FDA. Their work is based on sound science and is the gold standard for policymaking, including this policy we are debating today—one of the most important food and agriculture decisions in recent decades.

At our hearing, the Federal Government expert witnesses highlighted the steps their agencies have already taken to ensure that agriculture biotechnology is safe—safe to other plants, safe to the environment, and safe to our food supply. It was clear our regulatory system ensures biotechnology crops are among the most tested in the history of agriculture in any country. At the conclusion of the hearing, virtually all Senate Agriculture Committee members were in agreement. What happened? When did sound science go out the window? Since that hearing, the U.S. Government reinforced their decisions on the safety of these products.

In November, the FDA took several steps based on sound science regarding food produced from biotech plants, including issuing final guidance for manufacturers that wish to voluntarily label their products as containing ingredients from biotech or exclusively nonbiotech plants.

More important, the Food and Drug Administration denied a petition that would have required the mandatory labeling of biotech foods. The FDA stated that the petitioner failed to provide the evidence needed for the agency to put such a requirement in place because there is no health safety or nutritional difference between biotech crops and their nonbiotech varieties, regardless of some of the rhetoric we have heard on the floor of the Senate.

Thus, it is clear that what we are facing today is not a safety or health issue, despite claims by my colleagues on the Senate floor; it is a market issue. This is about a conversation about a few States dictating to every other State the way food moves from farmers to consumers in the value chain. We have a responsibility to ensure that the national market can work for everyone, including farmers, manufacturers, retailers, and, yes, consumers.

This patchwork approach of mandates adds costs to national food prices. In fact, requiring changes in the production or labeling of most of the Nation's food supply for a single State would impact citizens in our home States. A recent study estimates that the cost to consumers could total as much as—get this—\$82 billion annually, which comes to approximately \$1,050 per hard-working American fam-

ily. This Vermont law, which is supposed to go into effect in July, will cost each hard-working family \$1,050. Let me repeat that. If we fail to act, the cost to consumers could total as much as \$82 billion annually and will cost each hard-working American family just over \$1,000. Now is not the time for Congress to make food more expensive for anybody—not the consumer or the farmer.

Today's farmers are being asked to produce more safe and affordable food to meet the growing demands at home and around a troubled and very hungry world. At the same time, they are facing increased challenges to production, including limited land and water resources, uncertain weather patterns, and pest and disease issues. Agriculture biotechnology has become a valuable tool in ensuring the success of the American farmer and meeting the challenge of increasing their yields in a more efficient, safe, and responsible manner. Any threat to the technology hurts the entire value chain—from the farmer to the consumer and all those who are involved.

I also hear—and I do understand the concern from some of my colleagues about consumers and available information about our food. Some consumers want to know more about ingredients. This is a good thing. Consumers should take an interest in their food, where it comes from, and the farmers and ranchers who also produce their food. I can assure you the most effective tool consumers have to influence our food system or to know more about food is by voting with their pocketbooks in the grocery stores and supermarkets. This legislation puts forward policies that will help all consumers not only find information but also demand consistent information from food manufacturers. However, it is important, as with any Federal legislation on this topic, for Congress to consider scientific fact and unintended consequences.

The committee-passed bill created a voluntary national standard for biotechnology labeling claims of food. I have heard concerns that a voluntary-only standard would not provide consumers with enough information, even though there is no health, safety, or nutritional concern with this biotechnology. So we worked out a compromise to address these concerns by providing an incentive for the marketplace to provide more information.

This legislation will allow the markets to work. However, if they do not live up to their commitments and information is not made available to consumers, then this legislation holds the market accountable. Under this proposal, a mandatory labeling program would go into effect only if a voluntary program does not provide significant information after several years. The marketplace would then have adequate time to adjust and utilize a variety of options—a menu of options—to disclose information about ingredients, along